

In 2002, the authors both spent considerable time on Rapa Nui and in the company of Kiko Pate. During our discussions, he revealed with great joy that he had experienced a vision indicating that he was going to die. He seemed very happy with this knowledge and, when Grant asked him when he thought this might happen, Kiko replied with the Spanish expression: “Cuando Dios quiere” — “When God wishes it”.

And so it has happened.

— Grant McCall & Dan Bendrups

Editor's note: Anthropologist Grant McCall first met Kiko Pate in 1968 and worked closely with him throughout the ensuing 40 years. Ethnomusicologist Dan Bendrups writes on Rapanui music and was a student and friend of Papa Kiko

during the former's PhD fieldwork (2002-2004) and thereafter. Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastián Englert, on Easter Island, has a sound archive of traditional Rapanui music containing many of Kiko's songs.

For anyone interested in knowing more about Papa Kiko and his life, Dan Bendrups wrote a biography of the man... “Easter Island Music and the Voice of Kiko Pate: A Biographical History of Sound Recording”. It was published in 2007 in *The World of Music* (Vol. 49, No. 1, pp. 125-141). As Bendrups wrote, “Kiko Pate gave tirelessly of himself and his knowledge to anyone who sought his counsel, yet he remained largely anonymous in the historical record that he was largely responsible for generating. This biography was written in recognition of Papa Kiko's unique contribution to Rapanui heritage”.

A LOOK BACK

“EASTER ISLAND”

With annotations by Georgia Lee & Shawn McLaughlin

The following anonymous report first appeared in the Washington DC *Star* on July 27, 1889 and was later re-printed in the Orcutt, California, *West American Scientist*¹ in January of 1891. The misinterpretations and mistakes in the following leave us breathless. The account was taken, at least in part, from William Thomson's *Report of the US National Museum for 1891*. But many of the comments by the author appear to be his personal observations (perhaps from viewing an exhibition?). Thus we hear about hemp (instead of *hau*) and bulrushes (instead of *nga'atu* or *totorá*), granite and slate (not!), plus numerous other misinterpretations due either to a fast and casual reading of the Thomson report, or to the fervid imagination of a novice (and forever anonymous) reporter. Words are misspelled, even more so than is found in Thomson's report, and from the types of error it seems that the author got some of the information orally and simply misheard the words. One can only wonder about the three kinds of carvings cited by the author as being male, female, and ribbed. Ribbed? As in a third sex?

...

The hideous [!] stone images and carvings in stone and wood in the U.S. National Museum attract attention to the curious people who inhabit Easter Island. The island was the home of the image makers, and the products of their skill and imagination are emblems of hideous idolatry. Paymaster Thompson [*sic* – Thomson] gives an interesting description of these curious people and their relics. It is doubtful, he says, whether the present race are descendants of the image makers. He is inclined to think that there was an earlier prehistoric

race. One of the most noteworthy facts discovered through their archaeology is that they had a written language. The collection from Easter Island includes images, stone and wood carvings, stone spear heads, various implements, weapons, and utensils of industry illustrative of the “civilization” of the people. In his description of the relics of the Easter Island collection Mr. Thompson states that it does not appear that the ordinary stone and wooden images, in which the island abounds, were in any sense idols. They seemed rather to be erected as our bronze is erected in the parks, to commemorate individuals.

Be this as it may, the visitor at the National Museum must be strongly disposed to look upon these monstrosities [!] in carving as the idols of a heathen race. The wooden images are of comparatively recent date. They are divided into three classes — the male, the female and the ribbed. The stone images are very rudely carved and are of earlier date than those of wood.

There are three stone idols, however, of higher rank than these — nothing less than that of stone gods. These are the fish god, called by the native “Mea Ika”; the bonit's god, called “Mea Kahi”; the fowl god, called “Mea Moa”.² These are all ill-shaped and apparently without distinguishing characteristics but they are considered worthy of worship by the natives. While the various other images were intended as effigies of chiefs or other persons of importance, these received a profound religious homage.

These gods were never common and were possessed by communities or clans, and never by individuals. The legends all claim that they were brought to the island by the first settlers. An especial god being set apart for the bonits, as distinct from the other fish, is attributed to the fact that fish has always been abundant and highly prized as food. Fish always constituted an important article of diet with the natives, and the abundance in which they were found is ascribed to the faithful and constant adoration to the stone fish gods. The fowl god was believed to ward off evil influences by being placed

at night near where the chickens were accustomed to roost. It was moved about from one house to the other as the necessity for its services was felt. These stone gods show no attempt at carving in their construction.

The primitive sinkers and fishing hooks of these islanders shown in the collection are of stone. Some of the sinkers are fastened in a network of twine, while others are attached to the fishing line by means of a whole [*sic*] bored in the stone. The hook is a crude sort of contrivance, forming about three-quarters of a circle, the security of the hold when a fish is caught depending upon the inward turn at the point. The manufacture of one of these hooks was an immense labor. Other hooks are made of a man's thigh bone. Tradition on the island describes how the first bone hook happened to be made. In the prehistoric period of the image makers a youth named Ureraius³ was apprenticed to a fisherman of Hanga Pico.⁴ After having mastered the profession he obtained a canoe and went regularly into the business for himself. Somehow he was not successful. He worshipped the fish gods diligently, but his prayers and devotion failed to give him luck. The finest fish escaped him. Mea Ika and Mea Kahi seemed offended at him. On one occasion, after a period of particularly bad luck, he determined to pray all night by the god Mea Kahi. At midnight, while still at his devotions, the spirit of an ancient fisherman named Tirakaka⁵ appeared and told him that his ill-luck was due to the imperfections of his hooks. The spirit told him to go to the tomb and get a piece of thigh bone from the remains of his father, and to construct the hook of this bone. The young fisherman was much frightened, but he went to the cave the next day and got the thigh bone. For many days the time usual with him for fishing was spent in labor on the construction of this "enchanted" hook. His friends thought he was fishing, and they used to ridicule him because he brought home no fish. He took this with more complacency than the modern fisherman receives such taunts, for his moment of triumph was near.

When he finished his hook he sought a place distant from his companions and in a few minutes had his canoe full of fine fish. The extraordinary success of the youth caused many questions to be asked of him and provoked jealousy, but he refused to impart his secret. His stubbornness led to serious quarrels and finally an attack was made upon him to force the secret from him, and in maintaining [the secret] he lost his life.

In the manufacture of these bone hooks the material used is invariably the thigh bone of an old fisherman. They are provided with barbs and are cunningly contrived.

The stone axes of Easter Island are made of hard slate — black, red, and gray, called maca toke. Granite is used also for axes. The hardest and finest stone implements are made of the flinty beach pebble, known as maca keng-rengo. The images were constructed of a stone called maca matariki, and the obsidian, from which the spear heads were made, is known as maca mataa.⁶ The spear heads of obsidian were roughly chipped and varied in form. Nine different forms are given by Mr. Thompson, some of which are strikingly similar in shape to the old battle-axes of our early ancestors. These stone heads were lashed on shafts eight feet long and formed the chief

weapon of the ancient islanders. They were thrown at a distance as well as used to thrust with. These spear heads were got chiefly from old tombs and caves. A few were found on old battle grounds. Tradition imparts that the use of these stone spear heads was brought about by an accident. The natives used to make ineffective war armed with spears with head of dried calabash. On account of the character of the weapon they used to fight long and desperately without much result. A man returning from a hard and fruitless battle stepped on a stone that cut his foot. He carried the stone home and discovered it to be a material suited for spear heads. Weapons were at once made with points of this material and the enemies of the clan were quickly routed. Clubs from four to six feet are another class of weapon or baton shown in the collection. The points of the clubs of one class are slightly widened, and the handles are ornamented with double faced images. These were the batons or badges of office of the chiefs, and the handles were supposed to represent the effigy of the owner of the club or one of his illustrious ancestors. The clubs used as weapons of defense were from 20 to 30 inches in length and from the handle are widened out into a broad heavy blade. They were used with great dexterity in battle. A wand carried chiefly by the women in their dances has upon its flattened side the effigy of some woman noted for her grace and skill in dancing.

The hats of the Easter Islanders were crownless. They wore headdresses of feathers for ornament and to shade the face, perhaps. The collection shows six different styles. They are made of chicken feathers secured by the quill end to a foundation of knitted hemp, intended to fit around the head closely. The hat worn by the dancing women is small and narrow with fine feathers of bright color overlapping all the way around. The hat worn by married women upon the occasion of a ceremony connected with a betrothal is larger and broad, made of black feathers about six inches long, clipped evenly all the way around. The men at their food feasts wore a small hat of feathers with long tail feathers hanging behind. The hat of the chief worn as an insignia of office is very large and heavy, the front made of short feathers set up on end and clipped evenly like a garden hedge, and the back ornamented with the largest and finest tail feathers to be had. The minor officials and chiefs ex officio wear a lighter hat, made of short black feathers, with four tail feathers on end and tending outward at regular intervals. These headdresses are highly regarded by the islanders.

From an early period the natives of Easter Island have used large fish nets, which are very well made of wild hemp. The nets used for fighting purposes and the strong ropes used in handling the gigantic stone images were made of this wild hemp. Wooden needles, called hika,⁷ were used in making the nets. The paddles used by the Easter Islanders for their canoes were eight feet long, made with double blades, frequently decorated with carving or painted heads, and for superstitious reasons made of drift wood whenever it could be had.⁸

Two curious relics are the fetish boards. The "timioka"⁹ or ordinary fetish board, is a broad flat paddle made of bone, 14 inches broad and 30 inches long. It is supposed to possess rare powers in working a charm upon an enemy. The individual

working the charm performs a convulsive sort of dance, making mysterious movements with the wand and muttering incantations in a monotonous tone. Such a charm is supposed to bring speedy death upon its victim.

A special potato fetish called "raha" has ascribed to it the power to protect the potato crop [or sweet potato?] from insects, drought and evil spirits that might be interested in the injury of the crop. These fetish paddles are only 24 inches long, with a blade at each end, and are painted a bright red.¹⁰

The baskets and mats of the Easter Islanders were made of bulrushes. The mats are used to sleep upon.

Mr. Thompson secured two tablets of wood inscribed with hieroglyphics. These give to the island an especial interest as showing that the image and platform makers possessed a written language. These tablets are in a good state of preservation, and were supposed to be the only perfect ones to be found on the island. The largest one is believed, from its shape, to have formed at one time a section of the side of a canoe. These tablets were common on the island until a few years ago, when Catholic missionaries, through excessive zeal, had them destroyed. The characters carry their signification in the image they represent, and the manner of reading them is to begin at the left hand lower corner on the particular side which will bring the figures erect. Finishing the lower line with the figures turned toward the reading, and going to the next line above, the reading is continued from right to left. In order to have the images face the same way it is necessary, in reading a new line, to turn successively the right side of the table to the left. Arriving at the top of the first face of the tablet, the reading is continued just over the edge to the nearest line at the top on the other face. The tablets vary in size, from a few inches to four or five feet in length. The hieroglyphic characters are about half an inch in height, and are beautifully engraved in regular lines. The engraving is supposed to have been done with sharks' teeth. The native traditions about these tablets are very doubtful, imply asserting that the first king possessed the knowledge of this language, and brought with him to the island sixty-seven tablets containing allegories, proverbs, and traditions, relating to the land from which he came. A certain number of youths from each clan were instructed in the reading of these tablets, and once a year the people assemble to hear them recited. This was regarded as their most important fete day. These tablets are of undoubted antiquity. Some of the oldest platforms and the door posts of some of the ancient stone houses are inscribed with hieroglyphics that appear occasionally upon the tablets. The tablets secured by Mr. Thompson were 9½ inches by 3½, and 24½ inches in length by 4½ in width.¹¹

The houses found on the island were of the most primitive style of architecture, built close together in parallel streets, facing the sea.¹² They are built of small slabs of stratified rock, piled together without cement. They are not of uniform size. The average interior measurements would be about 14 feet in length by 6 in width, but a few were found of double that size. The walls are about 5 feet thick and the roofs are composed of long flat slabs of granite upon which mounds of earth have been piled. They have no windows and the doorways are on a

level with the ground and so small that it is difficult for a large man to gain an entrance. The distance between the floor and roof is about 5 feet 2 inches, and the interiors are generally lined with slabs, upon which are painted figures of birds and animals.

The natives who occupied these houses were small of stature and the contracted entrances are believed to have been designed as a protection against their enemies.

The most important sculptured rocks were found in the vicinity of these houses. The hard rocks are cut to represent human faces, figures, birds, fish, and animals. These sculptured rocks are very much decayed by time and they are evidently more ancient than the houses. One figure, reproduced upon almost every rock, seemed to be half human and half beast, with bowed back and long claw-like legs and arms.¹³ Some slabs taken from one of the houses which was torn open represented some sort of marine animal with bird's head and beak. Another represents the same sort of an animal with another head.¹⁴ Another represents the animal with two heads, turned toward each other.¹⁵ The natives say there is a significance in the position in which these heads are spaced. A number of roof and wall slabs were taken from these houses carved with nondescript figures. Some ancient skulls were found among the ruins with mystical figures carved on them.¹⁶ These were supposed to have come from the king's platform.¹⁷ The workshops where the great stone images were made were in the craters of the volcanoes where the stone was had.

The present race upon the island is almost extinct. It is said that at one time there were 20,000 people there. At present there are 155 natives on the island, who are supposed to bear relationship to the Malays. The interest of the place is in its relics of antiquity, its tablets preserving a written language in hieroglyphics, and in the immense stone "platform" and gigantic stone images, which are found in great numbers and are of great antiquity. Mr. Thompson found 113 of these platforms, the largest of which was 150 feet long. These are regarded as burial places. They are rude structures of stone, varying in height, not above 9 feet and very long and narrow in form. Upon these were placed the gigantic stone statues. On the largest platform were found 15 of these images. This platform was 150 feet long, 9 feet high, and 9 feet wide. With the original wings it would have been 540 feet long.¹⁸

The images on these platforms are regarded as effigies of chiefs or distinguished persons. Some 552 of these images were found by Mr. Thompson and his party. The largest of these was 70 feet high.

NOTES

¹ Volume 7, No. 56, pp. 76-83.

² *Mea* is the *Rapanui* word for "red"; *ika* means "fish"; *kahi* means "tuna"; and *moa* means "chicken". "Bonit", a derivative of the Spanish "bonita", used to refer to "tuna".

³ Thomson (1891:533) spells this word as "Urevaiaus".

⁴ Hanga Piko is the only cargo dock on Easter Island, situated just southwest of the center of Hanga Roa.

⁵ "Tirakoka", according to Thomson (1981:533).

- ⁶ Neither slate nor granite is found on the island; the author uses “maca” for “rock”, which is probably a transcription error where *maea* would have been the appropriate word.
- ⁷ Bone needles on Easter Island are known as *ivi*.
- ⁸ The “superstition” to which the anonymous author refers probably relates to the fact that, at this time in Easter Island’s history, wood was a very rare and precious commodity.
- ⁹ Thomson (1891:536) calls this “Timoika”.
- ¹⁰ Thomson (1891:536) calls these “rapa” and states they were painted light red in color.
- ¹¹ These would be the so-called “Small Washington” and “Large Washington” tablets now housed at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC USA.
- ¹² Clearly these are not just island houses but, judging from descriptions of their construction and of adjacent petroglyph carvings, they are the stone houses of ‘Orongo.
- ¹³ The *tangata manu* or “Birdman”.
- ¹⁴ The Sooty Tern, no doubt, and also most likely the Frigate Bird.

- ¹⁵ The *Manu Piri* — a motif said to signify the concept of family.
- ¹⁶ The “mystical” symbolism included *komari* or vulva shapes.
- ¹⁷ The “King’s Platform” is generally recognized as Ahu Akahanga, found on the south coast.
- ¹⁸ Ahu Tongariki, obviously.

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GETTING TO KNOW YOU

PAUL HORLEY

- Q.** How did you get into archaeology, and specifically Easter Island archaeology? What triggered your interest?
- A.** My interest to Easter Island started with reading Thor Heyerdahl’s *Aku-Aku* at the age of about ten; the vivid descriptions of the island, its people and their unique culture, and especially the majestic photographs taken by Erling Schjerven, had a truly captivating effect on me. Almost twenty years later, working on a research project in México (*i.e.*, only one ocean away from Easter Island!), I was lucky to have a chance to visit Rapa Nui and to stay there for ten days — a truly magnificent and unforgettable experience! After returning home, I decided to study more about the history and culture of this unique island.
- Q.** Who or what do you consider as your most significant influence (scientific or otherwise) either as a person or a particular work (or series of works)?
- A.** I am most sincerely and deeply grateful to Georgia Lee for her great help and support. Actually, even before we started to communicate, she was already guiding my exploration of Easter Island — I was visiting its great archaeological sites with Georgia’s *Uncommon Guide to Easter Island* in hand. Later, Georgia kindly answered my numerous e-mails, generously sharing her great knowledge on Rapa Nui culture, heritage, and the problems of its preservation. I am also especially thankful to Georgia for the great opportunity to do joint research work with

her dedicated to one of the most fascinating Rapa Nui sites — the Birdmen village of ‘Orongo.

- Q.** What theory or project of yours turned out to be different from what you had expected as, for example, a complete surprise?
- A.** It was very surprising to find that the accounts of early visitors to Easter Island contain much more detailed and accurate information than appears at first sight. Some of these observations may be misplaced or improperly captioned — but, in the majority of the cases, they allow one to extract a lot of useful information about numerous archaeological sites.
- Q.** What would you have done if you had not pursued your current line(s) of research and interests?
- A.** Most probably, I will be developing numerical methods for the computer image enhancement, making 3D models, or studying photogrammetry and stereoscopic photography.

